

Tough Questions and Objections

In my winery hospitality workshops, I ask the attendees to describe to me their least favorite questions, complaints and comments from their winery visitors, then, I have everyone practice answers that satisfy both themselves and their guests. Preparing in advance a calm, unrushed, well-thought-out answer takes the awkwardness out of it for everyone involved.

Some common questions and objections that tasting room staffers get:

Why is your wine so expensive?

Do you ever have qualms about selling alcohol?

I better not join the club today. . .buy wine today. . .because. . .

We already have too much at home.

I'm not sure.

I don't want to pay the shipping.

We already own too much wine.

We belong to too many wine clubs.

Your wine is too expensive.

We live too far away to come to your events.

In some cases, resistance by your guests is just a natural or even a habitual reaction when in a retail atmosphere. When approached in a store, after being greeted, customers often say, “No thank you, just looking.” And then they might say, “Do you have this in red?” In fact, they are there to buy, but their first response is rejection!

To answer their rejections with a scripted response just pushes them away psychologically. No one likes a hard-sell—and I know that’s not your style. My recommendation is to walk in their shoes. Show understanding of their feelings by saying:

Many people feel as you do.
I can see why you say that.
I hear that a lot these days.
I understand.
I agree with you.

“We have just started to visit wineries. Maybe later.”

Express your understanding of their feelings, then as the tasting proceeds, encourage them to make notes on the tasting menu. At the end of the tasting if they still are not ready to buy, give them your card, or write your name and phone

number on the menu, and tell them to feel free to call you at the end of the day. Offer to have their wine choices all ready for them to pick up; and, your winery may also offer delivery to their hotel.

“Your wine is just too expensive.”

Keep it conversational and non-confrontive by using lighthearted responses such as “I know exactly how you feel!” Take away the perceived negative about the price and by changing it to a powerful reason for purchasing that pricey wine. You can say, “I certainly do see where you are coming from. These are considered the best Cabernets made in this region and they are limited in production. You might want to consider them for that very special occasion you mentioned, and for when you want to bring back the memory of your visit!”

“We already belong to too many wine clubs”

Try saying something like, “I know what you mean. A lot of avid wine lovers find themselves in several wine clubs before they know it! One solution is to rotate your club memberships, dropping out of an old one when you join a new one.”

Your courtesy, your attention to their objections, and your absence of pushiness all go a long way. It is your intention and your attitude that are remembered, not your selling tactics. You not only sold wine, you started a relationship. Who do you think they will recommend to their friends?

I've heard that some visitors call, after arriving home, to arrange for wine shipment and to express thanks to their host!

Grumbles and Complaints

Consider yourself a consultant who solves problems. You already know what people are likely to ask you and what they complain about, if they do complain. So, put on your consultant's hat, rephrase or reiterate the comment or the question to show that you are taking it seriously, then give your best information or advice. Consultive selling is empathy backed by product knowledge.

Remember you are selling, serving and educating. Never treat an objection or a complaint with contempt, no matter how silly or unreasonable it may seem. Use cushioning words like these:

I understand that you could be concerned about . . .

I can see how you might think that.

In answer to your concerns about serving alcohol, we take great pride in promoting our wines as enhancements to food, and we always recommend moderate drinking.

You know, I often get that question.

I see your point of view.

I know exactly what you mean.

Thank you for letting us know.

If you have no good answer to a complaint, just say, “*I never thought about it that way before.*” Or, offer to find out more and give the customer a call later. Sometimes, people just want to hear themselves complain and they don’t expect or need an answer or a solution. Assume a warm, open look and allow him or her to sound off until they have said it all (so they can save face).

Be gracious, apologize for any inconvenience, and when there is nothing else you can do, ask for their name and contact information, and promise to follow up (giving you a chance to talk to management). Then, just smile!